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## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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#### SECRETARY MCKAY SUPPORTS LEGISLATION FOR GRADUAL ELIMINATION OF FISH TRAPS IN ALASKA

Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay today urged that Congress enact legislation to provide for the gradual elimination of fish traps in the waters of Alaska.

Secretary McKay said that a shift in the industry from trap fishing to fishing with less expensive type of gear may be expected to strengthen the competitive position of individual fishermen or small-scale operators. "With a limited resource to develop," he declared, "it seems right that opportunities to participate in it should be distributed as widely as possible."

In a report prepared at the request of the House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, Secretary McKay said that the Department recommended that Congress act favorably along the general lines of H.R. 242.

This bill, now pending before Congress, would authorize and direct the Secretary of the Interior to close down, over a five-year period, all salmon traps in the waters of the Territory.

At present, Secretary McKay pointed out, he has no authority to abolish the traps, since under existing law he may not discriminate against one form of gear or in favor of another. Therefore, he said, if the traps are to be eliminated it must be done by congressional action.

Secretary McKay said that if Alaskans had control of the matter, they would undoubtedly have started action to abolish fish traps long ago.

He noted that in an advisory referendum held in October 1948 the electorate of Alaska voted, by a majority of 19,712 to 2,624, in favor of a proposal that fish traps be gradually abolished over a period of 10 years. In addition, the Secretary said, the Territorial legislature has on more than one occasion memorialized the Congress to prohibit trap fishing.

"The Department of the Interior believes," he said, "that the Federal Government should attempt to create a more normal pattern of regulation and activity in a matter which is primarily of Territorial rather than Federal concern. This is particularly important when local sentiment strongly urges, as it does on this question, that Alaska regulations be brought in line with those found elsewhere."

The States of Washington and Oregon, the Secretary pointed out, abolished fish traps years ago.

"It is an anomalous situation," he asserted, "that fish traps still exist in Alaska."

Economic arguments in favor of abolishing the traps are decisive, the Secretary said.

"Traps are a form of fishing equipment which require capital outlays beyond the capacity of most individual fishermen to finance. Salmon are also caught in Alaska with purse seines, beach seines, gill nets, troll lines, and other types of gear. These are commonly owned by individual fishermen conducting small-scale operations."

"The Department has no particular objection to the formula set forth in H. R. 242," he said, "while recognizing that Congress might properly prefer some different period of time or different procedure."

For many years traps have been one of the chief methods of catching salmon in Alaskan waters. In recent years the proportion of the Alaskan salmon catch taken with traps has been declining, largely because of the closing, through regulatory action or voluntary agreement, of some of the trap sites in order to permit larger escapement.

"Various arguments have been urged in favor of eliminating the traps, not all of which have equal validity," Secretary McKay said. "For example, it is sometimes argued that the traps should be abolished as a conservation measure. Years of experience give no support to this argument. The basic conservation problem is one of permitting escapement of sufficient salmon to maintain the runs in succeeding years. That can be done as easily through regulating the traps as through regulating other types of gear."

The salmon fishing industry has for many years been by far the most important single industry based upon the use of Alaskan resources. During the fishing season of 1954 the number of people employed in this industry totalled about 20,500 and the value of the catch, as prepared for market, amounted to about \$68,200,000.

"For that reason," Secretary McKay said, "the Department of the Interior has a deep interest in the welfare of those engaged in the industry, as well as in the policies which will permit the maximum reasonable benefits which the fishery is capable of yielding."

The Department's report sent yesterday to Rep. Herbert C. Bonner, chairman of the House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, stated that the Bureau of the Budget has advised that there is no objection to the submission of the report.

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